Review Article

IDEOLOGY, NARRATIVE ANALYSIS, AND POPULAR CULTURE

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By showing that the formal analysis of mass culture has come of age, two recent books suggest that a new way of raising the old questions about the relationship of culture to society is possible. Indeed, they make important, if unequal, contributions to the methodology of narrative analysis in general, at the same time that they suggest that a rigorous investigation of cultural forms – of the internal dynamics of superstructures as such – may prove a good deal more crucial to the student of social history, particularly in the area of periodization, than has often been thought. Both Will Wright's *Sixguns and Society* and John G. Cawelti's *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance*[1] offer materials for a new theory of ideology–surely the key link or mediatory concept in any attempt to link cultural objects with social phenomena. They demonstrate that a new conception of the ideological, if it is to draw on the findings of the study of myth, of psychoanalysis and of structural anthropology, must take as its privileged object of investigation narrative itself, now considered as a "form of reasoning" about experience and society (Wright, 200) of equal dignity to the various types of conceptual thought in service in daily life.

The very uncertainty as to the name for the subject-matter of these books,[2] by dramatizing its homelessness in the various academic disciplines (should it be "taught" in English Departments or by the sociologists?), points to the two equally untenable alternatives which have characterized the older efforts in this area. On the one hand, it has been claimed that, insofar as mass culture is a "culture industry" (Adorno), and one very intimately related to advertising techniques and invested in by high finance and heavy industry, it

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is sheer manipulation almost by definition. There can therefore be no interest – or at least no intrinsic interest – in its formal analysis: one could of course demonstrate the various techniques of conditioning, salesmanship, and ideological brainwashing that are to be observed in other sectors of modern social life as well, but none of this has any relevance to the study of narrative, or rather, it happens in spite of narrative rather than because of it. This approach is of course historically related to the older or classical concept of ideology itself as sheer false consciousness: a form of collective error which the older positivisms and Marxisms oppose to some form of scientific truth. Thus, it would seem that a rather different attitude towards the forms and texts of mass culture needs to be developed if one no longer shares this view of the nature of ideology itself. Indeed, both of the two fundamental schools of the newer Marxism today – the Hegelian or German-oriented "Western" or "neo" Marxism, and the structural or Althusserian variety – propose quite different models for understanding ideology itself, and thus, presumably, for grasping its function in culture. So Althusser's definition ("the representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence"[3]), by suggesting that ideology as a quasi-narrative has a vital mapping function to play in all societies, and not merely in those which are class-based, would seem to demand a complete overhaul of the older conception of mass culture as manipulation. Meanwhile, the identification made by the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness,* of the "science of society" with the ideology of the proletariat as the last and most dehumanized of all the social classes, suggested fresh and anti-positivistic paths for the Frankfurt School to break. If, as Jay has shown, much of the American approach to so-called low-brow culture derived from the influence–sometimes subterranean–of Frankfurt School research,[4] we may also suggest that, alongside the negative judgments developed by that work[5] there are the elements of a more complex view, in which mass culture is seen as drawing its power from a repressed Utopian longing. So Adorno rebukes Veblen's debunking of mass cultural forms in these terms: "The happiness that man actually finds cannot be separated from conspicuous consumption. There is no happiness which does not promise to fulfill a socially constituted desire, but there is also none which does not promise something qualitatively different in this fulfillment."[6] Paradoxically, however, the analytic machinery necessary to do justice to this Utopian leaven of a degraded mass culture was not developed by the Frankfurt School but rather, on a wholly different basis, by the structural study of myth and narrative, whose proper use Professor Wright's work so triumphantly demonstrates.

The other alternative offered by the older view of mass or popular culture

was to dignify individual products by assimilating them to high culture and insisting on their literary (or filmic) value. Cawelti's book is not altogether free from this approach, as his subtitle suggests, and there is often something defensive about his emphasis on the artistry and the quality of his various objects of study (*The Godfather,* Wister's *Virginian,* Hammett, Spillane, Irving Wallace, etc.). He has wise observations about the difference between literary and formulaic reception: "We might loosely distinguish between formula stories and their 'serious' counterparts on the ground that the latter tend toward some kind of encounter with our sense of the limitations of reality, while formulas embody moral fantasies of a world more exciting, more fulfilling, or more benevolent than the one we inhabit." (38) Indeed, this distinction becomes a methodological instrument at one point in his work, namely the revealing chapter on the classical detective story, where Poe's prototypes of the latter are shown to be structural variants of his work in other, more "literary" forms.[7] Most frequently, however, Cawelti's defense of the cultural merit of his texts strikes me as misguided, and that for two reasons.

First of all, the fundamental antithesis between high or "serious" and popular culture is in reality methodological, rather than a difference in the object. Academic literary study generally aims at the analysis of a single text, while the books under consideration here necessarily deal with a corpus of texts (and this is what studies of mass culture have in common with the older generic criticism). Northrop Frye, whose myth or archetypal criticism is a model for Cawelti, has observed that a genuine poetics must bracket or suspend questions of value in its investigation of forms and patterns common to all literary or narrative texts. This insistence is one of the reasons why Frye has sometimes been classified (e.g., by Robert Scholes, in his *Structuralism in Literature*) as a structuralist, and we find this strict differentiation between poetics as a study of structures and an evaluating criticism of individual texts defended once again in Todorov.[8]

But there is a second problem with Cawelti's antithesis between "serious" and popular culture which, though closely related to the previous objection, is more substantive, and that is the historical content of the opposition, for what must be measured against John Ford is not Shakespeare, but rather, say, Wallace Stevens. The only working opposition that makes any historical sense in the present context is not that between Literature in general and mass culture, but rather that between the two dominant forms of contemporary cultural production, literary or artistic modernism on the one hand and the conventional or "formulaic" production of mass or media culture on the

other. The older literature, particularly pre-capitalist literature, was conventional and generic in ways analogous to mass culture: the disappearance of genre, of convention, of standard formulas and indeed of plot itself, is not some eternal characteristic of high or "serious" literature in general, but rather an historic feature of contemporary modernism, to which the persistence of plot and convention thus stands in an opposition which is a dialectical relationship and an object of study in its own right. But Cawelti never takes this step, which would, it seems to me, transform the very bases of the study of mass culture.

Anglo-American literary criticism has taken lyric poetry to be the paradigm of literature in general, so that it has had little enough to offer the student of narrative in the way of method and conceptual instruments until fairly recently. The dominant method for the analysis of the novel has been the concept of the "point of view," derived from Henry James' theory and practice, and belatedly codified, not without some important modifications, in Wayne Booth's *Rhetoric of Fiction.* This method, however, is unsuitable for the study of a literary or textual corpus, and its commitment to the limits and possibilities of individual vision has tended to deflect its findings in a predominantly ethical direction. The other, more recent models for a possible narrative analysis are those embodied in the two books under study, namely Frye's archetypal method, and the structural approach to narrative. It should be pointed out that both books contain a critical polemic against the excesses of the methods in question: Wright argues forcefully against Lévi-Strauss' distinction between hot and cold societies (structural anthropology, along with its techniques of narrative analysis, being applicable only to the latter), and offers his own work as a demonstration of the validity of Lévi-Strauss' approach to the "myths" of historical societies as well. Cawelti clearly has some (well-founded) doubts as to the widespread adoption of the mythic approach, particularly in American studies, where it has become something like the dominant methodological ideology. Indeed, his own concept of the "formula" provides a very adequate structural substitute for the notion of the archetype, and one which divests the latter of its ideological overtones and its mystifying picture of human action. Unfortunately, he does not follow up his own insight, but tends to fall back on the archetypal model whenever he passes to practical criticism of individual texts: thus, the hard-boiled detective story becomes the occasion for remarks about the "vision" of the modern city (140–142). Nothing is quite so calculated to deprive a cultural text of its social and historical functionality as this rhetoric of myth and vision, which suggests that alternative "myths" or "visions" were available to artist or public and that the content of the work was ultimately a

matter of aesthetic choice and sensibility, something on the order of a *Weltanschauung.* But the modern city is the historical *content* of works such as those discussed by Cawelti as well as of the "visions" incorporated in them, and as such it imposes historical limits of its own which are not a matter of individual choice or feeling. It should be added that this omnipresent rhetoric of myth owes little to Frye himself, or rather, is based on a misconception and an ideological appropriation of his own more rigorous structural scheme.

Cawelti has not, however, succeeded in emulating Frye's work in that area where it is the strongest, namely in the construction of a structural typology in *Anatomy of Criticism.* The chapter Cawelti entitles "Notes toward a Typology of Literary Formulas" is the weakest part of the book, for it fails to isolate some deep structure of which the various "formulas" would be so many structural variants (this is what Frye does), while at the same time the still relatively surface forms with which Cawelti is left—he suggests that the basic ones are adventure, romance, mystery, melodrama, and alien beings or states—obviously come out of social and historical contexts which are not at all comparable with each other. He thus ends up being neither adequately structural nor adequately historical. Yet this weakness in his overall conceptual framework is due partly to the very ambitious scope of his book as a whole, which means to range across the popular genres from gangster novel and western all the way to the bestseller.[9] The very archaism of "fantasies" like adventure or romance, which Cawelti finds operating in the oldest literatures, tends to assimilate media culture to anthropological constants and thus to work against that definition of the specificity of the former which the book aims at elsewhere.

It is disappointing to have to conclude this exploration of Cawelti's book on a negative note: his work is full of stimulating observations, while from a historical and bibliographical point of view it is probably the most useful general study on the subject. Moreover, the book is constantly informed by a sense of the social functionality and the historical situation of its objects, and it may only be a kind of methodological timidity which drains such attentions of their force by hedging them with all kinds of "pluralistic" qualifications. Thus, Cawelti numbers Marxism among the "deterministic" approaches to literature, and then refutes it by attacking Freud and psychoanalytic interpretations instead! But surely apprehensions about reducing the work to a single explanation or determinant are terroristic when they come at the beginning of the analytical process, and serve as ways of ruling out certain interpretations in advance rather than at the end, where they may legitimately suggest further areas of research. Pluralism has indeed become the

strategy and the rallying cry for a contemporary American literary criticism in crisis, with the limitations of its formalist tradition now inescapable and the options of Marxist, Freudian and linguistic methods intolerable. At his best, as in *The Six-Gun Mystique* or the "social melodrama" chapter of *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance,* Cawelti transcends this fuzzy doctrine and approximates something like a model of the overdetermination of the work. Thus, he insists on "the Western's capacity to accomodate many different kinds of meaning–the archetypal pattern of heroic myth, the artistic imperatives of dramatic clarity and unity, the influence of media, the tendency of popular forms to assume a game-like structure, the need for social ritual and for the disguised expression of latent motives and tensions" (*Six-Gun Mystique,* 85). The trouble is that, as contemporary philosophers like to say, these "meanings" are not on all fours with each other, and unless hierarchical relations are established between them, such an approach tends to disintegrate into sheer eclecticism. So in the more recent book–and quite out of keeping with its sociological focus–Cawelti finds himself talking about the "psychological needs" answered by formula art, and a historical view of publics and their demands gives place to psychology and conjectures about human nature. Meanwhile, even his perceptive reading of the social content of *The Godfather*–whose new formula, he tells us, "ambiguously mirrors a world in which the individualistic ethos no longer satisfactorily explains and orders society for most members of the public" (77)–is ultimately vitiated by the lack of any real historical paradigm or philosophy of social and historical change. I think we may take it as axiomatic that there is something mystifying and ahistorical about any cultural commentary which concludes in some essentially ethical denunciation of the decay of present-day America–"a society of empty routines, irresponsibly powerful organizations, widespread corruption, and meaningless violence" (79)–without relating those developments to the internal dynamics of late capitalism itself as a system.

The question is, however, how a type of narrative analysis may be devised which can be both structural and historical, thereby avoiding the two-fold dangers of some ahistorical appeal to psychological needs and faculties on the one hand, and the mythic and ultimately ethical approach on the other. Cawelti's notion of the formula should have given us just that, and served as a mediation between the intrinsic structure of a text and its public, besides laying the basis for a theory of literary convention:

> The concept of a formula as I have defined it is a means of generalizing the characteristics of large groups of individual works from certain combina-

> tions of cultural materials and archetypal story patterns. It is useful primarily as a means of making historical and cultural inferences about the collective fantasies shared by large groups of people and of identifying differences in these fantasies from one culture or period to another.(7)

Unfortunately, Cawelti does not seem to have had at his disposal the technical means necessary to implement this concept, and it remained for Will Wright, in *Sixguns and Society,* to give a detailed practical demonstration of how such a critical and analytic method would function. Wright's work, in its (for some surely excessively) painstaking step-by-step argumentation, and its rigidly self-imposed procedural limits (the top-grossing American Western films from 1931 to 1972), is at its strongest precisely where Cawelti's work seems most tentative, and may be said to offer a working synthesis of two rather distinct currents in structural analysis: that which derives from Lévi-Strauss' "Structural Study of Myth" (chapter XI of *Structural Anthropology* I) and that which traces its ancestry back to Vladimir Propp's study of narrative functions in *The Morphology of the Folktale.*[10]

The first of these structural approaches may be loosely characterized as an attempt to view narrative synchronically. The advantages of doing so are two-fold. On the one hand, the view of a given narrative[11] as a single mechanism or synchronic unit allows us to speak about its social function in a way that would be more difficult were we dealing with a mere batch of episodes: so Lévi-Strauss "argues meticulously that the myths of totemistic societies serve to resolve conceptual contradictions inherent in those societies" (Wright, 19).

However, a synchronic approach to narrative also allows us to focus on the various semantic tokens, the various mechanisms for the production of meaning, or *codes* as they are currently known, the various binary oppositions, out of which the narrative is constructed and of which it may now be seen as the articulation in time. For Wright, the basic oppositions at work in the Western which may then be "coded" in any number of ways, are four in number: inside society/outside society; good/bad; strong/weak; and wilderness/civilization.[12] As Wright uses them, these coding mechanisms know two decisive moments of intervention in the reception of the narrative: the first is as a way of evaluating the various characters as they are introduced to us, of "reading" the characters off against the grid of codes. In a later chapter (143–153), Wright shows how the various sequences of the episodes, the various segments of the action, are then coded as so many messages (e.g., Danger, Status, etc.). His work here thus makes a contribution to the two

most crucial areas of research in semiotics at the present time: the analysis of characters and the theory of narrative propositions.[13]

But the center of gravity of Wright's study lies in the diachronic type of structural method developed by Propp, whom he follows in his isolation of a series of basic narrative episodes or "functions" whose presence in a relatively fixed order constitutes the genre in question. *Sixguns and Society* is not only the most important work in this tradition since Propp himself, but also Wright's modifications substantially improve Propp's model as an instrument of analysis. One reason why Propp is so congenial to the study of the Western lies in the nature of the corpus involved: both fairy tale and Western offer large bodies of texts which are relatively lengthy and episodic. The mainstream of the semiotic analysis of narrative—that of A. J. Greimas—has tended to focus on individual texts which were relatively compact (e.g., short stories), and whose manifold of episodes could thus more easily be reduced to some single overall mechanism.[14] But for all its interest, this kind of approach tends to reduce the experience of the work in time to a set of synchronic systems, like the codes mentioned above.

Propp's method, by insisting on sequence and on the multiplicity of different episodes, shifts the focus to the production of narrative,—to what we may call the internal diachrony of the work, as opposed to the external diachrony of the work's position in history itself and in the development of forms—while maintaining a level of generality or abstraction that allows us to compare the various individual narratives with each other. So Wright finds sixteen separate functions to be present in one form or another in most of what he calls the "classical" Westerns, and these include units like: the hero enters a social group, the hero is unknown to society, the villains threaten the society, and so forth. At this point, no doubt, there will be room for useful and productive disagreement about the precise functions Mr. Wright has defined: his final sequence (the hero defeats the villains, the society is safe, the society accepts the hero, the hero loses or gives up his special status) will certainly be questioned by other students of the Western.[15]

But to understand disagreement over various interpretations as an objection to Wright's method itself is to misconceive the very use of models in general. The reproach that the functions are "inaccurate" would carry more weight against Propp than against Wright's modification of him, for the Russian theorist posited but a single sequence of functions for the fairy tale in general. The use of his model thus encourages a primarily typological or classificatory activity, matching a given tale against the basic functions to see

whether it may be considered a folk tale or not. Wright, however, has used the concept of a sequence of functions to propose four fundamental variants, which he terms the classical, the revenge, the transition and the professional plots respectively. For him, therefore, deviation from a given sequence is meaningful and can only lead to further analytical activity, where for Propp it is simply "noise" and an aberration, something which cannot be accomodated by his system.

Let me belabor this point, for it is here that we grasp the full originality of Wright's approach as well as a fundamental lesson of his method. *Sixguns and Society* proposes what is currently known as a *combinatoire* or permutation scheme, as opposed to the more static typological scheme of Propp. The *combinatoire* has the initial advantage of allowing the analyst to deal meaningfully with conformity and variation alike; and this is not, as we have seen, the case with the classification scheme (for which difference is simply noise), nor is it the case with another current model of literary analysis, that of the norm and the deviation from it, in which the latter—ostensibly valorized and the bearer of meaning: e.g., poetic language is deviation from the norm of everyday speech—ends up secretly reinforcing the norm after all. In the *combinatoire,* there is neither deviation nor norm, but simply variation. What this means is that the new scheme now begins to accomodate history itself and the social situation, as that external limiting situation or condition of possibility which accounts for the coming into being of a given variant and excludes the others. In this kind of analysis, therefore, there can no longer be any question of the traditional incompatibility between intrinsic and extrinsic interpretation, between the formal reading of the text and its evaluation in terms of social or historical "context," for the *combinatoire* requires both types of interpretation for its completion, and not in some impossible synthesis, but maintaining each in its own methodological rigor. Thus the historical value of a book like Wright's is in direct proportion to the intransigeantly formal or structural treatment of his texts, and vice versa.[16]

Let us now see how well such a combinational model is able to do justice to the Western. Wright's classical plot is one in which a hero who is alien to a relatively weak society enters it, defends it against villains, and, in its concluding section, "loses or gives up his special status" and becomes a respectable member of society just like everybody else (marriage, settling down on a farm, hanging up his guns, etc.). In the revenge variant of this plot, the relation to society alters:

> unlike the classical hero who *joins* the society because of his strength and

> their weakness, the vengeance hero *leaves* the society because of his strength and their weakness. Moreover, the classical hero *enters* his fight because of the values of society, whereas vengeance hero *abandons* his fight [at the climactic moment he lets the villain live] because of those same values. Thus, the vengeance variation indicates a change in the relationship between the hero and society, which seems to begin a steady deterioration that continues through the transition theme and the professional plot. (59)

The most familiar example of the inadequately named "transition plot" is *High Noon,* in which "the hero is forced to fight against society, which is virtually identified with the villains of the classical story" (74). Here, like the revenge variant and unlike the classical plot, the hero begins *within* the society; yet unlike either one, he ends up outside society, grinding his badge scornfully in the dust. Already we can observe a kind of structural progression in which the alteration in a given individual element projects a new overall plot variant as a whole, but from which the final form, the *terminus ad quem* of these variations, has not yet emerged. This is clearly what Wright calls the professional plot proper, a category which includes the great bulk of the so-called new Westerns (the Sergio Leone/Clint Eastwood bounty-hunters, the *Wild Bunch*-type outlaw gangs, etc.). Here we can observe that the small accretion of structural variations has resulted in something like a quantum leap: the professional plot no longer concerns itself with the individual hero, with the lonely gunfighter of the classical Western, but rather with a collectivity:

> The heroes are now professional fighters, men willing to defend society only as a job they accept for pay or for love of fighting, not from commitment to ideas of law and justice. As in the classical plot, society is portrayed as weak, but it is no longer seen as particularly good or desirable. The members of society are not unfair and cruel, as in the transition theme; in the professional plot they are simply irrelevant . . . Thus, the group of heroes supplies the acceptance and reinforcement for one another that the society provided for the lone hero of the classical plot. (85–86)

It thus comes as no surprise to find that the terminal function of the new plot is no longer couched in terms of integration with or separation from society, but rather of group solidarity: "The heroes stay (or die) together."

With this fourth and ultimate avatar of the Western, the social dimensions of

Wright's formal evolution begin to emerge. It is clear that the films present a picture in which the older American small town–the "society" of the classical plot–little by little dissolves as a useful narrative framework. Nor can its replacement be seen as the big late-19th-century industrial city of naturalism, with its *anomie* and impersonality, for that was simply the dialectical opposite of the small town. The new social world is rather that suburban Los Angeles-type decentralization, dominated by multinational corporations and transcontinental networks of various kinds, in which only professional castes and individual networks of acquaintances are able to feel any kind of group identity. This is the social reality reflected by Wright's professional plot, and his paradigm is confirmed by Cawelti's reading of *The Godfather* as a structural innovation in the tradition of the gangster film. For Cawelti, the essential features of this "new mythology of crime" are:

> (1) the character of the organization leader, the Don or Godfather, as Puzo calls him; (2) the central figure of the specialized professional criminal, highly trained and talented in his vocation and ruthless in his dedication to it–let us call this figure the Enforcer from the fact that one of the most popular versions of the character is the professional assassin; and (3) the type of narrative structure that is organized around the careful preparation and execution of a complex criminal act, the caper. (65)

The similarity of this new variant with Wright's professional plot suggests that we might rewrite the history of the gangster film itself in terms of the formal evolution described in *Sixguns and Society:* the early 30's films of Robinson and Cagney, in which the gangster is seen as a lone psychopath, would be dependent on an opposition of hero to society analogous to that of Wright's classical plot. The great tragic gangster films of the 1940's–Bogart's in particular–would then correspond to the vengeance or transition periods.[17] Finally, the ethnic gangster film reinvents the professional collectivity of ghetto life and "organized crime." Similar patterns ought to be detectable in the other formula genres, or in their supersession of each other (hard-boiled detective story replacing the classical kind, sudden primacy of the spy film as the very quintessence of the professional plot, etc.).

We must consider the methodology of this kind of sociological interpretation of a formal or structural sequence, and the problems such interpretation poses. A good deal of confusion may be avoided by a resolute admission at the outset, namely, that the sociologist of literature or culture is absolutely dependent on the paradigms of social history and class relations furnished him by the specialists in the field. It is exceedingly rare that a literary or

cultural analyst will be able, as was Lucien Goldmann in his research on Port Royal, to develop a new historical or sociological model in terms of which he may proceed to interpret his formal and structural findings. For the most part he will be at the mercy of the historical and sociological work that has already been done, and if none is precisely adequate for his purpose–if, for example, a Marxist student of literature is unable to locate a reliable Marxian guide to the dynamics of his particular period–then his work is likely to remain incomplete.

On the other hand, Wright's book demonstrates that this relationship is not a one-way street, and that the analyst of culture has something very vital to offer the historian and sociologist, something without which their own work risks incompleteness. Wright's own guides to recent social history are not, to my mind, the most reliable: he draws heavily on Galbraith's *New Industrial State,* as well as on Habermas and MacPherson, and his general stance towards the historical developments revealed by his professional plot seems most closely related to diagnoses of American life like those of Riesman or White's *Organization Man,* which deplore increasing bureaucratization.[18] But Wright's own sociological model is, it seems to me, merely a starting point, for he has merely used his historical mentors to establish the structural features of a periodization scheme which is essentially superstructural, one which undertakes to posit the fundamental breaks or discontinuities in the nature of daily life. The economic or social historian cannot himself make these determinations, or, if he does, it is because he has changed hats, and is now projecting a feeling about, say, the specificity of life in the 1930's back onto his research into the organization of business in that period. Without cultural models, without some phenomenology of daily life to guide him, he cannot determine whether an infrastructural trend should be seen as inaugurating a whole new period, or whether it is merely a straw in the wind. But it is a study like Wright's which, by demonstrating some fundamental structural change in the narratives consumed by a given public, provides the first clues, the first tell-tale oscillation of the pointer marking the presence of a geological rift. It then becomes the business of the social historian to confirm or to invalidate such hypothetical periodizations suggested to him by the investigation of the materials of culture and consciousness, in other words, the superstructure. Thus Wright's book seems to offer interesting evidence as to the most recent of these "great transformations," and the one that touches us most closely, namely, the emergence of what has variously been called the *société de consommation,* or post-industrial media society, the latest and most original of the forms take by late monopoly capitalism, an emergence to which Wright's new "professional" plot is surely intimately linked.

In this respect, however, his work is marked by a crucial ambiguity, albeit of a productive kind. The paradigm change documented by his reading of the Western would seem related to something like the fate of individualism itself, and clearly for Wright the significant feature of this structural evolution proves to be the disappearance of the individual hero himself, who is replaced by the professional group. Cawelti had aptly formulated the narrative of the classical Western as follows: "the representation of a heroic figure as mediator between the aggressive individualists of the old West and the new values of the settled town" (249), a formulation which gives a good deal more concrete social content to Wright's abstract scheme of hero-society-villain. Yet taken at this level, as Cawelti's language suggests, the narrative remains a representation, something like a mimesis (as stylized as you like) of a struggle going on in the real world of history itself.

Wright's analysis (not inconsistent with this reading) tries to answer a different kind of question about the relationship of the narrative to social reality; it tries to show how a story could serve an ideological function, or better still, how the process of storytelling itself could appear to resolve an ideological contradiction. For it is no longer simply a matter of illustration, in which the narrative line would be limited to the confirmation of a certain number of propositions about life and the world (e.g., families are good, lone individuals are bad). Something like that is at work in the crudest narratives and at the lowest level of narrative complication. But the model Wright has borrowed from Lévi-Strauss (and here again the basic text is "The Structural Study of Myth") suggests a more sophisticated stage in the development of ideological consciousness, a moment in which the contradictory nature of ideology itself has become at least temporarily visible.

It has not been sufficiently observed that in Lévi-Strauss' well-known structural reading of the Oedipus myth, the two contradictory terms of the mythic structure correspond to the infrastructure and the superstructure. He saw the mythic narrative as an attempt to think through the inconsistency between blood or kinship relations and beliefs about the origins of the human race (autochthony as against some other form of generation): "the overrating of blood relations is to the underrating of blood relations as the attempt to escape autochthony is to the impossibility to succeed in it."[19] Yet if we understand the kinship system in his sense, as the infrastructure of primitive or pre-market societies, then this tension corresponds to a discrepancy between a mode of social organization (kinship) and the ideology (in this case, cosmology, religion, beliefs about the origins of mankind) which had originally come into being to express, perpetuate and legitimate it. For the

subject of mythic storytelling, this is a contradiction which has taken the form of an antinomy: what "for us" (as Hegel would say) is a poorly-fitting match between ideology and social reality, "for him" is an intellectual and conceptual paradox, a knot of thoughts that cannot be developed further, a crux which demands resolution of an intellectual or ideological type (the prestidigitation of the mythic narrative itself), rather than the practical solution of social and historical change. This mismatch between superstructure and infrastructure is not the only form that ideological contradiction can take, but it is the one which Lévi-Strauss and Wright find operative in the types of narrative production they are considering.

The contradiction which Wright sees at the heart of the classical Western is the growing distance between the values of individualism and the realities of Galbraith's "planned, corporate economy" or what Marxians would call the monopoly stage of capitalism These two terms, which, as in Lévi-Strauss' illustration, correspond to the superstructure and the infrastructure respectively, evoke a moment in which an older ideology and its rhetoric are becoming outmoded by the development of a post-individualistic kind of socio-economic organization. Individualism was the classical form of bourgeois ideology in a two-fold way: it reflected an earlier, more "individualistic" stage in the development of the market (Polanyi is Wright's basic text here), and its values constituted an aggressive conceptual instrument against the older feudal and hierarchical world-view which was based on caste difference. The Western preserves this now archaic ideology of individualism by a kind of structural sleight of hand: individualism remains a living value and continues to exist as a reality and not merely a concept, in the person of the hero himself, while the patent inapplicability of individualistic thinking to contemporary social realities is explained away by the presence, alongside the hero, of "society" as a separate entity (the townspeople, etc.), to which this ideology could then not be expected to be relevant:

> Efforts to work with a group through mutual support [this would then correspond to the emergence of one or the other ideologies of collectivism] are doomed to failure, just as society fails to defend itself from the villains. If an individual—in the generic sense—is to help others, he must be an individual in the market sense; that is, he must depend only on himself and act as he knows best. Reliance and trust in a group will only weaken him . . . Thus, the existence of society and the happiness of the individual depend upon a negotiation between the two positions or sets of values. (148)

The final acceptance of the hero by society seals this narrative trick: we have been shown that the ideology of individualism is still very much alive, but that it need not apply to us, so that its apparent inapplicability to the present-day world cannot amount to a disproof or refutation.

It is Wright's reading of the new or professional plot that introduces the methodological ambiguity I referred to above. For now, perhaps because this is an ideology in formation, the relationship between narrative and conceptual content has altered, and there can no longer be any question of the narrative resolution of an ideological contradiction because the ideology is not yet felt to be contradictory. The new ideology—for Wright it is that of technocracy, as opposed to the older one of individualism—will simply be illustrated by the plot. Or perhaps, the model of ideological analysis has shifted ground entirely and now the professional narrative is seen as simply reflecting a new stage in social organization itself (this was Cawelti's reading of a similar development in the "mythology of crime").[20]

At least some of this methodological inconsistency may come from the self-imposed limits of Wright's corpus, for the date at which he begins (the beginning of the sound film) does not necessarily reflect some more fundamental social transformation; or, put the other way round, the classical market economy has already been a thing of the distant past by the time Wright's "classical Western" emerges to solve its contradictions. Wright's historical framework is further distorted by his exclusion of the literary Western altogether.[21] Even Cawelti's periodization of the Western film has a significantly longer-range perspective than Wright's, and, while not inconsistent with the latter's interpretation, suggests that there is room for further structural analysis along those lines:

> The development of the high-quality western in the twentieth century has been marked by a series of . . . cycles in which new "adult" westerns become temporarily appealing to the general public, and then decline, only to be replaced by another version of the formula. The first such cycle followed on the success of Wister's *The Virginian* and reached a peak in the early 1920's . . . [with] the great popularity in film of W. S. Hart, Tom Mix, and of such films as *The Covered Wagon* and *The Iron Horse* . . . The popular success of *Stagecoach* [1939] is generally considered to be the beginning of a new cycle of "adult" western films that reached a peak in the late forties and early fifties, when films like *High Noon* and *Shane* were among the most successful and esteemed productions of 1952 and 1953 . . . Then, in the later 1960s, several striking new versions of the

> formula appeared in successful films like *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, True Grit, The Wild Bunch,* and Sergio Leone's Clint Eastwood series, [all of these named by Wright as illustrations of his "professional plot"], and it appeared that another cycle was beginning. (231–232)

Yet the methodological ambiguity in Wright's work strikes me as productive in another sense as well, namely, for the further questions it causes us to ask about the problem of the relationship between ideology and narrative which these two books so richly explore. At the very least, it would seem that we must make room for two models of that relationship: one in which the growing contradictions of an obsolescent ideology are in some narrative way "resolved," another in which the narrative undertakes to produce a new ideology. At the most, however, we may find ourselves obliged to allow for the possibility of a historic change in the very function of ideology itself. If it is so that, as Adorno says, today the commodity is its own ideology–or, in other words, that the consumer system is now self-policing and self-regulating, and operates by way of the internalization of the supreme value of consumption itself–then present-day consumer society would presumably no longer be dependent on the older forms of ideological legitimation that were generated by philosophies and cultural activities and educational institutions (Althusser's State Ideological Apparatuses), along with outright physical coercion. In that case, culture might well be expected to undergo a modification of its function as profound as that of ideology itself. This is a question which only further analysis of this kind can answer, and indeed can ask.

NOTES

1. Will Wright, *Sixguns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western* (Berkeley, California, 1975); John G. Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Popular Art and Popular Culture* (Chicago, 1976).
2. Popular culture? Yet is there still a "people" in the older 19th century or populist sense? Mass culture? But is not the term "masses" an anachronism which comes to us from the realities of the older industrial city and the polemics of an older left and right both? Media culture? Is not the expression tantamount to a surrender to the technological determinism of the McLuhanites?
3. Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy,* Ben Brewster, trans. (New York, 1971), p. 162.
4. Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination* (Boston, 1973), p. 217.
5. Such as Adorno's denunciation of jazz, his analysis of the degradation of the aesthetic through the fetishization of artistic form and perception, all judgments which would seem to confirm the dismissive and debunking approach of those for whom mass culture is manipulation.
6. T. W. Adorno, *Prisms,* Samuel and Shierry Weber, trans. (London, 1967), p. 87.
7. "In both 'The Fall of the House of Usher' and 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue,'

the story moves toward the increasing imposition of the internal processes of the mind on the exterior material world. But where this internal process reveals itself as one of chaos and corruption in 'The Fall of the House of Usher,' Dupin imposes the supreme clarity of his mind on the apparent chaos of the outer world . . . 'The Purloined Letter' . . . can be seen as a benevolent inversion of 'The Fall of the House of Usher'," (pp. 100–101).

8. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, N.J., 1957), pp. 14, 16. Robert Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature* (New Haven, 1974). Tzvetan Todorov, "La Poetique," in *Qu'est-ce que le structuralisme?* (Paris, 1968).
9. His earlier book on the Western, *The Six-Gun Mystique* (Bowling Green, Ohio, n.d.), was more successful precisely on account of its limitations.
10. Vladimir Propp, *The Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin, Texas, 1968).
11. For as Wright uses the term myth – which he derives from Lévi-Strauss rather than from Frye – it comes simply to mean narrative in general.
12. What classical structuralism would have dealt with as nature/culture becomes here the occasion for a shrewd assessment of the use of landscape as a powerful coding device.
13. See François Rastier, "Un concept dans le discours des études littéraires," in *Essais de semiotique discursive* (Paris, 1973), pp. 185–206; and Tzvetan Todorov, "On Linguistic Symbolism," *New Literary History,* 6,1 (Autumn, 1974), pp. 111–134.
14. Such as Greimas' own contract broken/contract restored scheme, Lévi-Strauss' notion of the imaginary resolution of social contradictions, or, most frequently of all, the view that the work dramatizes the passage from Nature to Culture.
15. Thus, of a film both take to be the most perfect embodiment of the classical Western, Cawelti says: "Finally, Shane's commitment to the pioneer cause forces him to reenact his role as a gunman. But, as a killer, he can no longer remain a part of the pioneer community. Wounded in his battle for the pioneers he must ride off into the wilderness again." (The Six-gun Mystique, p. 50.) But Wright sees this ending differently: "Shane leaves, relinquishing his newly acquired position as the deadliest man in the valley. There is no law for a hundred miles, and he could, of course, stay in the valley and maximize the rewards of his power and the farmer's gratitude; but he gives up his status as gunfighter and savior and chooses instead the dark night and the cold mountains," (p. 47).
16. For further reflections on the nature of a *combinatoire,* see my "Magical Narratives: Romance as Genre," *New Literary History* 7,1 (Autumn, 1975), pp. 135–163, esp. pp. 157–159; and my "Figural Relativism, Or, The Poetics of Historiography," *Diacritics* 6,1 (Winter, 1976), pp. 2–9.
17. About whose historical context – veterans returning from World War II? pre-Cold War hopes for social regeneration? – a good deal more needs to be said.
18. Even this view of social history, however – for which a product like *The Godfather* would be seen as exercizing a fantasy about group cohesion and collective solidarity – seems to me more useful than Cawelti's negative reading, quoted above, in which the work simply reflects increasing lawlessness and social disintegration.
19. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York, 1967), p. 212.
20. For an analysis of the narrative embodiment of a similar technocratic ideology in a "modernist" or literary text, see my "Modernism and Its Repressed: Robbe-Grillet as Anti-Colonialist," *Diacritics* 6,2 (Spring, 1966), pp. 7–14.
21. The key dates in the development of the latter are, according to Cawelti, James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking tales, (1823–1841), and Owen Wister's *The Virginian* in 1903.

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